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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000818

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [REGION](#) [BILAT](#) [OFFICIALS](#)
SUBJECT: CENTRAL COMMAND GENERAL ABIZAID'S MAY 8 MEETING
WITH CROWN PRINCE SALMAN

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Centcom Commander General Abizaïd met with Crown Prince Salman May 8 and discussed the May 6 GCC Consultative Meeting in Riyadh, the Iranian threat, building up defenses in the Gulf, and the situation in Iraq. The CP said the GCC leaders were far more cooperative towards each other than in previous sessions ("Intra-GCC squabbles are now off the table"), reflecting how seriously they are taking the Iranian threat. The GCC wants to get a handle on the possible environmental risks of an armed confrontation or nuclear accident. He recommended that if there are to be hostilities, the goal must be removing the Iranian regime rather than just a punitive strike, which would serve to embolden the leadership. Iran is engaged in a charm offensive with the Gulf States to show it is a neighbor in good standing. He said that the GCC had decided to send Omani Deputy PM Sayyid Fahd to Iran to deliver a message and seek assurances on the nuclear program. General Abizaïd suggested building a shared early warning system and improving air defense capabilities in the Gulf. The CP expressed interest in leasing PAC-3 batteries and noted the coming TPS-59 radar system would improve Bahrain's integration with allies. On Iraq, Shaikh Salman said Iran would try to keep Iraq weak, and he recommended the U.S. track flows of funds from Iran to Iraqi groups. End Summary.

GCC Taking Iranian Threat Seriously

¶2. (C) In their May 8 meeting, Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa provided Central Command' General Abizaïd with a briefing on the GCC heads of state Consultative Meeting held in Riyadh on May 6. He commented that the mood at the meeting, which his father King Hamad attended, was far more cooperative than in previous sessions. Intra-GCC squabbles are now off the table. This indicates that the GCC leaders are taking the Iranian threat very seriously. A paper on Iran was circulated describing the threat. The leaders want to mitigate the impact of a possible escalation and get a better handle on the possible environmental risks of a confrontation with Iran or a nuclear accident there.

¶3. (C) The Crown Prince said it would be unwise to provoke Iran militarily while the diplomatic track is in train. If there are to be hostilities, the goal must be to remove the regime, not just deliver a punitive strike, which would

embolden the leadership. He sees a confrontation coming with Iran either this year or next year. The current Iranian "charm offensive," he said, is annoying, just a public relations exercise. (Note: Iranian Foreign Minister Motakki was in Bahrain the same day and saw the King.) Iran wants to be seen in public with Gulf leaders to leave the impression that it is a neighbor in good standing. Bahraini policy is to meet with Iranian officials, speak positively about relations, but tell them that they need to reassure their neighbors that concerns about the nuclear program are being accommodated. The CP said he personally avoids the Iranians. When he is forced to see them, he tells them they are not doing the right thing.

Omani Envoy to Deliver GCC Message to Tehrn

14. (C) In response to General Abizaid's question Shaikh Salman said that the GCC countries will ull back from their diplomatic engagement with Iran when the time comes to do so. He said the GCC leaders had decided to send Omani Deputy Prime Mnister Sayyid Fahd Al Said to Iran to deliver a message and to seek assurances on the nuclear progrm. The Omani was chosen because of his country's relationship with Iran. The purported reason fo the trip is to express concerns about possible nvironmental damage from the nuclear program, bu the envoy will indirectly address the enrichment program. The Crown Prince suggested that the mostviable diplomatic channel for achieving results ould be direct engagement between the U.S. and Iran. But the U.S. position should be viewed as one of strength. To reinforce the point, U.S. forces should consider a joint military exercise in the Gulf region.

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15. (C) General Abizaid proposed building up the defenses of our allies in the Gulf, looking specifically at a shared early warning system and improving air defense capabilities. The CP replied that he had discussed with Secretary Rumsfeld the possibility of deploying Patriots in Bahrain and making an exception for Bahrain's Stinger missiles. At the bilateral Military Coordination Committee meeting coming later this month, Bahrain will ask to lease PAC-3 batteries and place them around the island. This is an affordable way to upgrade Bahrain's defenses. Also, the TPS-59 radar system will be coming soon, and this will improve Bahrain's ability to integrate more broadly with allies. General Abizaid noted that the Saudis were also interested in establishing and integrating an early warning architecture. He had discussed missile defense with the Egyptians and Jordanians. The Gulf as well as other areas must be defended, and these countries would provide strategic depth. Additionally, the Israelis should feel that they would not be subject to nuclear attack. The CP stated that Bahrain has more in common these days with Israel than with Iran.

U.S., NATO Security Umbrella

16. (C) Returning to a point he has raised several times before, the CP suggested the U.S. or NATO put the GCC under some sort of security umbrella, or the U.S. could issue a statement that it would defend the region in the event of a WMD attack. The GCC is feeling trapped between Iran and Israel, and is worried about being caught in a regional arms race. With the high price of oil, some regional countries were considering launching their own nuclear programs, such as establishing educational reactors at universities. This is not a good development.

Iraq, Syria

17. (C) General Abizaid said that Iran's support for Iraqi Shia splinter groups that attack coalition forces is unacceptable. Iran is sadly mistaken if it thinks that an attack along the lines of the 1983 Marine Barracks bombing in Lebanon will drive out the U.S. Turning to Iraq, Shaikh Salman said it is a very difficult process to rebuild institutions from scratch. It is important that an effective government come into power soon. Iran will try to flex its muscles and keep Iraq weak, doing its best to sabotage the political process. The U.S. should adopt a broad-based approach to stop Iranian interference, including tracking the flow of money from Iran to Iraqi groups. Agents working on behalf of Iran must be exposed and pay a price. In response to General Abizaid's question, the CP thought Jordan was best positioned to understand the Iraqi Sunnis and their political dynamic.

18. (C) General Abizaid asked about ways to draw Syria away from Iran. The CP said he would think about it, but emphasized that efforts to mitigate Iran's influence in Arab countries not be seen as an attack on Shia Islam. The GOB is careful to say that it is against certain acts, not against Shias.

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